

Washington, DC – Today, Reps. Tom Rooney (R-Fla.) and Michael E. McMahon (D-N.Y.) celebrated a major victory in their joint crusade to increase mental health funding for our soldiers and veterans. McMahon and Rooney announced \$492 million for medical research, Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological health research, counseling and treatment programs included in the Defense Appropriations Act, which passed the House of Representatives today.

The freshmen lawmakers have been consistent collaborators in the fight to provide our service men and women with proper mental health care. In May, Reps. McMahon and Rooney sent a bipartisan letter, signed by almost fifty of their colleagues in the House, to Subcommittee on Defense Chairman John Murtha and Ranking Member Bill Young urging the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee to increase overall funding for mental health programs by \$300 million. Defense Secretary Robert Gates recommended this figure on April 6, 2009. The McMahon/Rooney letter received overwhelming support from the military and veteran communities. The \$492 million amount announced today for mental health funding is over \$120 million dollars more than called for by Reps. McMahon and Rooney as well as Sec. Gates. The Defense appropriators have reserved this amount strictly for TBI and Psychological Health research.

“I applaud the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee for clearly making the mental health of our soldiers and veterans a priority,” said Rep. McMahon. “As I’ve said before, I never forget that thousands of our brave men and women were sent to war after the tragic events of 9/11, which directly impacted my district and all New York City residents. Affording our soldiers and veterans with proper mental health care is not something we cannot afford to compromise on and I thank my colleague Tom Rooney for joining me in the fight to make sure we never do.”

“The funding in the Defense Appropriations Conference Report is greatly need to help our war fighters get the care they deserve. Thousands of soldiers and families will benefit from increased mental health research and care,” said Rep. Tom Rooney. “I will continue to work across the aisle with my colleague Rep. McMahon to address the mental health problems facing so many of our soldiers as they return home from Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to make sure the Department of Defense has the necessary resources to address this growing problem.”

The McMahon/Rooney letter was sent at a time when 2008 reported the highest level of army suicide within the military since 1980. So far this year, at least 349 men and women on active duty and reservists have taken their own lives- more than have been killed by enemy action in Afghanistan and Iraq combined. Also, with the onslaught of returning service members, 2009’s

army suicide rate is projected to further surpass the 2008 level. Additionally, the shootings in May at Camp Liberty of five of our nation's heroes indicated just how dire the need for mental health programs in the military had become. This increase in funding for mental health programs, along with a comprehensive post-deployment program to psychologically screen all of our service men and women, will go a long way to protecting our returning veterans. It will also allow for our newly returning service men and women to take proper care of their physical as well as psychological injuries through a program of mental health assessments and treatments.

A fact sheet detailing Reps. McMahon and Rooney 's work on behalf of our service men and women is attached.